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Faith in the Apostolic Fathers

Citation for published version:

Foster, P 2014, Faith in the Apostolic Fathers. in *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. Brill.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity

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Faith is a fundamental concept in Christian theology. The centrality of this concept is to be found in the earliest surviving writings of the Jesus movement, the letters of Paul. Each of the thirteen Pauline letters contains multiple references to faith. Furthermore, with the exception of the second letter of John, every writing in the New Testament draws upon the Greek semantic domain *πιστ-*. This semantic domain includes nominal, *πίστις* “faith”, verbal, *πιστεύω* “I believe”, and adjectival forms, *πιστός* “faithful”. This terminology remains prominent in the post-New Testament corpora of texts that form the artificial collection of writings known as the Apostolic Fathers. Terms drawn from this semantic domain are found in each of the texts that constitute this group of writings, although such terms occur with differing frequency between individual writings and with varied nuances of meaning. To ascertain the richness of this varied usage it is necessary to consider the writings individually before considering any overarching conclusions.

1 Clement

The epistle known as 1 Clement was sent by believers in Rome to the Christian community in Corinth to address the continuing issue of factionalism in the Corinthian community. There are thirty-seven occurrences of the *πιστ-* word group in 1 Clement, spread throughout the epistle. In the letter opening the Corinthians are commended by noting that those who have lived among them have found their “faith to be as fruitful of virtue as it was firmly established” (1 Clem. 1.2). Here the author praises the Corinthians for constancy in faith, and observes that their faith produces recognizable virtue. The second reference to faith presents a more negative example. The author chides the Corinthians for the loss of group harmony: “For this reason righteousness and peace are now far departed from you, inasmuch as every one abandons the fear of God, and is become blind in His faith, neither walks in the ordinances of His appointment, nor acts a part becoming a Christian.” (1 Clem. 3.4). Here God is presented as the object of faith, and the Corinthians because of their lack of group peace are described as deficient in faith. Hence, here faith is not simply intellectual assent but a mode of faithful existence that is exemplified by a godly and harmonious life. The letter also refers to the historic faith of leading figures. Paul is held up as a paragon of resistance to the forces of jealousy and strife. Having endured persecution and being constant in his ministry “preaching both in the east and west” the author is able to state of Paul that “he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith” (1 Clem. 5.6). Again faith is measured by constancy in the face of opposition and commitment to ministry. It may be that the equation that is being drawn between resisting persecution or opposition to strife and the reality of faith is being made because it suits the purpose of the letter as a warning against divisions.

The catalogue of the heroes of faith that spans several chapters of the letter (Paul, 1 Clem. 5.6; the Danaids and Dircae, 1 Clem. 6.2; Noah, 1 Clem. 9.4; Abraham, 1 Clem. 10.1, 7; Rahab, 1 Clem. 12.1, 8-9; Moses, 1 Clem. 17.5) is reminiscent of the list of the faithful characters found in Heb. 11.1-32. In fact the overlap in terms of common figures in both lists (Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Rahab) suggests that the author of 1 Clement was aware of the list of faithful heroes in Heb. 11, but redeployed this literary form to address the situation of concern in Corinth. While the faith of various individual figures is mentioned, unlike Hebrews it is faith itself that is being presented as the prime example that they offer to the Corinthians. The intent of the list is stated in the following manner: “All these the great Creator and Lord of all has appointed to exist in peace and harmony; while He does good to all, but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to His compassions through

Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Clem. 20.11). The admonition that the Corinthians adopt a life of concord is based upon “the faith in Christ” ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ πίστις (1 Clem 22:1). This terminology is not unpacked, and it is unclear whether Christ is viewed as the object of faith in the sense that the Corinthians are to believe certain things about Christ and place their trust in him, or whether the reference is more spatial stating that since they now live in union with Christ they are to live faithful lives that are consonant with this new existential state.

Faithfulness is presented as a characteristic of God, who is described as “the one who is faithful in all his promises” (1 Clem 27.1). In another somewhat ambiguous genitive construction, ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ, the sense appears to be that of viewing God as the object of faith, the one in whom the Corinthians are to believe: “let faith in him be rekindled in us” (1 Clem. 27.3). In one of the most significant soteriological statements in the letter, the author presents a dichotomized perspective on the relationship between deeds and faith. He states, “we, too, being called by his will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men” (1 Clem. 32.4). Hence, reflecting some prominent Pauline theological themes the author portrays works, even holy works, as being an ineffective basis for establishing a right or justified relationship with the deity. Yet in a catalogue of the gifts of God, even such faith is seen as divinely given (1 Clem. 35.1-2), and it is faith that enables believers to focus their attention on God who is the object of faith (1 Clem. 35.5).

The purpose of the apostles’ appointment of bishops and deacons was for the guidance of future believers or the faithful ones: “for future believers”, τῶν μελλόντων πιστεύειν (1 Clem. 42.4). One of the key remedies that is prescribed for the malaise of schism in Corinth is, among other characteristics, for believers to adhere to a life of faithfulness: “let one be faithful” (1 Clem. 48.5). Describing key characteristics of those who are destined for salvation through Jesus Christ, the author pairs together “the faith and hope of the elect”. This may draw upon the familiar Pauline triad of faith, hope, and love (cf. Rom. 5.1-15; 1 Cor. 13.13; Gal. 5.5-6; 1 Thess. 1.3; 5.8), but if so it truncates the Pauline formulation through the omission of a reference to love. A prime quality of God is that he is “faithful in all generations” (1 Clem. 60.1), and the deity is to be invoked by believers with an attitude of faith (1 Clem. 60.4).

In drawing the epistle to a close the author lists those qualities that are of importance for a virtuous life for the Corinthians. First among these qualities is faith (1 Clem 62.2). The writer declares that he is confident that his letter will have a good reception since he has written “to faithful people” (1 Clem 62.3). Moreover the letter has been sent with couriers who are described as “faithful and prudent” (1 Clem. 63.3). The final prayer for the Corinthians beseeches God to grant to those who call upon him a list of eight qualities, the first of which is faith (1 Clem 64.1).

Faith is a prominent theme in 1 Clement, and in many ways it is portrayed as a fundamental remedy to the problems of strife and factionalism that are seen as besetting the Corinthian community. However, nowhere in the letter is faith equated with intellectual assent to a set of beliefs. Instead it reflects an attitude of confidence and trust in the divine promises, and more generally the adjectival forms refer to a person who is trustworthy or faithful. This aligns with the general usage in the New Testament. However, the highest example of faithfulness is to be found in God who is both “faithful in all his promises” (1 Clem 27.1) and “faithful in all generations” (1 Clem. 60.1). Therefore for the author of 1 Clement the πιστ- word group describes behaviours, attitudes, or dispositions that evoke trust, fidelity, and faithfulness.

2 Clement

The writing known as the Second Letter of Clement is probably neither by Clement nor is it written in the form of a letter. It also has far fewer instances of words drawn from the πιστ- word group, with only ten occurrences. This may not be highly significant since 2 Clement is a far shorter text than 1 Clement.

The first use of the word group is in the form of the participle πιστεύσαντες, when the author states, “we who have believed are more than those who seem to have God” (2 Clem. 2.3). Here the ones “who have believed” is most readily understood as designating Christian believers in distinction from non-Christian Jews “who seem to have God”. However, the issue of Christian identity especially in contrast to Judaism is not found anywhere else in the text. The term, as it is used here, is used as an identity label to describe those who are genuine believers in God.

The next two occurrences of the word group are adjectives referring to a faithful person being faithful in much (2 Clem. 8.5), which is a citation of a saying attributed to Jesus (par. Lk. 16.10a). The saying itself speaks of fidelity in Christian life. In 2 Clement it is deployed to establish the author’s argument that during one’s earthly life there is time for repentance, and this should result in purity of life and observance of God’s commands. Therefore one is to be faithful during earthly life in order that one might be entrusted with the gift of eternal life. In this sense fidelity shows that a person is living in a manner that befits relationship with God. Further on in the author’s argument failure to serve God is equated with those who do “not believe the promise of God” (2 Clem. 11.1). Here the idea heads somewhat in the direction of intellectual assent, but perhaps the more dominant idea is that such people do not trust the fidelity of God. This is reinforced in the same section of the text where God is described in the following manner “he is faithful who has promised that he will bestow on every one a reward according to his works” (2 Clem. 11.6). The future recompense is described positively, since God will provide a reward to each person in accord with works, and one can be confident in that process since God is faithful. Here faithfulness is presented as a key divine attribute. The idea of recompense remains at the centre of the author’s thought in relation to the next two occurrences of the πιστ- word group. According to the train of thought, the perishing soul is able to be saved by individuals making a fitting recompense to God. This entails speaking and hearing “with faith and love” (2 Clem. 15.2). It is debated whether such faith designates an attitude of general trust or a religious faith. The religious dimension cannot be stripped away from the author’s thought here, but the distinction is probably creating too rigid a dichotomy. The idea is that of being assured of God’s promises, and hence allowing one’s actions to be characterized by faith and love. The religious element comes to the fore even more strongly in the following verse: “let us therefore abide in the things which we believed [ἐπιστεύσαμεν]” (2 Clem. 15.3). Here πιστ- terminology appears to designate the content of faith, the things believed.

The final pair of terms from this group stands in the last part of the exhortation calling for repentance. The addressees are encouraged to be constant and not to “believe now only, while we are admonished by the presbyters, but also when we have returned home” (2 Clem 17.3). The homily envisages public declarations of faith, accompanied by private lapses in belief. The consequence of this inconsistency is presented in stark terms, with such unbelievers being confronted with the eschatological vision of the Lord’s “glory and might”. At that time, such people are presented as declaring “nor did we believe; and we did not obey the elders when they

spoke to us about salvation” (2 Clem. 17.5). Here lack of faith or belief, which is best understood as a general attitude of trusting in God and assenting to the teaching of the presbyters, is viewed as the reason why some will not experience salvation. The author’s own gloss on this is that it refers to the day of judgment for those “among us who have lived ungodly life and perverted the commandments of Jesus Christ” (2 Clem. 17.6). Therefore the language of faith and unbelief is directed internally to members of a Christian community in order to confront perceived hypocrisy within the group.

In 2 Clement the language of faith and belief functions as an identity marker to designate those who truly follow God. At times it veers towards describing acceptance of a set of teachings, but this is never separated from living a faithful life that directs its trust towards God. The call to be constant in faith, and the concomitant negative judgment on those who are inconsistent, is directed towards members of the Christian community to whom the author addresses the homily.

The Letters of Ignatius

Each of the seven authentic epistles of Ignatius utilises terminology from the πιστ- word group. There are forty-six occurrences across the seven letters, although these are not evenly distributed.

In the letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius commends the recipients of the letter as possessing a much-beloved name, which they have “acquired by a righteous nature according to faith and love in Christ Jesus our Saviour” (I.Eph. 1.1). Here “faith and love” are key characteristics of Christian life, perhaps with the former denoting the attitude of trust to be directed towards God, and the latter describing the quality that is to govern relationships within the community. The next occasion when Ignatius refers to faith he informs the Ephesians that he disavows his right to command them to perform certain actions. Instead he addresses them as a fellow-disciple. Ignatius uses a form of reciprocal rhetoric to declare that the qualities he wishes to see in the Ephesians have in fact been stirred up in him by them. He writes, “for it was needful for me to have been stirred up by you in faith, exhortation, patience, and long-suffering. (I.Eph. 3.1). Here faith stands alongside other qualities that reflect examples of appropriate Christian behaviour. By contrast, elsewhere faith is the antithesis of unbelief (I.Eph. 8.2). In the complex image of the cross as a crane and the Holy Spirit as a rope, Ignatius states that “your faith was the means by which you ascended, and your love the way which led up to God” (I.Eph. 9.1), again combining faith and love as core Christian virtues. In a list of binary behaviours that are designed to respond to persecution from opponents, Ignatius counsels the Ephesians “in contrast to their error, be steadfast in the faith” (I.Eph. 10.2). Here, “the faith” is a shorthand designation for the Christian belief system and mode of existence. The sense is that believers are not to be deflected from their commitment to Christ in the face of mockery, opposition, or other external forces. Similarly concord in Christian assembly is seen as a means of overthrowing Satanic power through the common bond of faith: “when you assemble frequently in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith” (I.Eph. 13.1). Faith and love are to be directed towards Jesus Christ, the former being the beginning of Christian life and love being its teleological goal, although according to Ignatius’ theology these two aspects remain inseparable (I.Eph. 14.1). Expressed in a manner almost reflecting the outlook of the Johannine epistles, Ignatius declares that “no one professing faith sins” (I.Eph. 14.2; cf. 1 Jn 3.5-6, 9).

At times Ignatius portrays the “faith of God” as a body of teaching that can be corrupted “with wicked doctrine” (I.Eph. 16.2). At this point the usage of the term “underscores the extent to which ‘faith’ has become a matter of embattled beliefs” (Schoedel, 1985, 79). The faith and love that Ignatius desires to see exemplified in the lives of believers finds its ultimate example in “the new man, Jesus Christ, in his faith and in his love, and in his suffering and resurrection” (I.Eph. 20.1). The final reference to faith in this letter views it as an expression of corporate unity: “all of you, individually and collectively, gather together ... in one faith” (I.Eph. 20.2).

Writing to the Magnesians, although not having visited that city *en route* to Rome, Ignatius declares his desire “to address you in the faith of Jesus Christ” (I.Mag. 1.1). Thus Ignatius sees the basis for addressing unknown recipients so frankly and directly as stemming from the common adherence to a shared faith. Jesus Christ is again presented as “the constant source of our life, and of faith and love” (I.Mag. 1.2; cf. 6.1; 13.1). These terms remain unexplained at this point, but are seen as essential qualities if the Magnesians are to attain to the goal of being united with both the flesh and Spirit of Christ. Using the image of different coins, Ignatius classifies humanity into two groups, the unfaithful “οἱ ἄπιστοι” and the faithful “οἱ πιστοί”, with the latter group being stamped with “the character of God the Father by Jesus Christ” (I.Mag. 5.2). Faith is also seen as being received by those who recognize the soteriological significance of Christ’s death and resurrection: “our life also arose through him and by his death, whom some deny, through which mystery we have obtained faith” (I.Mag. 9.1). Tackling Judaizing opponents Ignatius declare that Christianity did not believe (ἐπίστευσεν) in Judaism, but it was the other way round in order that all who believe (πιστεύσασα) in God might be gathered into one (I.Mag. 10.3). Therefore, the idea of believing faith creates relationship with God, and with fellow believers.

In the letter to the Trallians, πιστ- terminology expresses the soteriological idea that believing in Christ and his death frees believers from the fate of death (I.Trall. 2.1). Ignatius declares that he is forearming the Trallians against the “snares of the devil” which is perceived to be the threat of docetic teachings. Key to this is the advice, “arm yourselves with gentleness and regain your strength in faith, which is the flesh of the Lord, and in love, which is the blood of Jesus Christ” (I.Trall. 8.1). Here his favourite formula of “faith and love” is combined with his Eucharistic and anti-docetic teaching. In many respects the faith and love dyad is a catch-all expression, that is used to validate the teachings Ignatius seeks to promote. He claims that the fundamental Christian qualities of faith and love align with his theological perspectives, and those that disagree with him are faithless and loveless. Ultimate faithfulness is however a quality possessed of God: “the father is faithful in Jesus Christ” (I.Trall. 13.3). In this way, and in common with other Christian writers of the period, for Ignatius the faith of believers is to be a reflection of the perfect faithfulness of God.

Martyrological fervour is most prominent in the letter to the Romans. Ignatius declares his desire be a true Christian, and sees martyrdom as the test that will authenticate his claim. He states he will be a Christian, “and then I shall be faithful, when to the world I am not visible” (I.Rom. 3.2). Addressing the Philadelphians, the role of Jewish modes of revelation is relativized, since the prophets’ key message is presented as being the proclamation of the gospel. In this way Ignatius co-opts the prophets as proto-Christians, stating that they placed their hope in Christ, “in whom also believing (πιστεύσαντες) they were saved” (I.Phld. 5.2). The closing greeting to the Philadelphians mentions various believers who Christ will honour, since “on him they set their hope in body, soul, and spirit with faith, love, and harmony” (I.Phld.

11.2). Again, Ignatius places faith at the head of a list of qualities that are indicative of Christian life, suggesting that faith is regarded as the cardinal attribute to be seen in followers of Christ. Ignatius is lavish in his praise of the Smyrnaeans. In his salutation he comments on their giftedness, stating that the gifts they have received have been given to a church “filled with faith and love” (I.Smyr. salut.). The Smyrnaeans are also said to possess “an unmoveable faith, having been nailed, as it were, to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ” (I.Smyr. 1.1). This striking imagery of a cruciform faith that is unshakeable in the face of suffering was no doubt aligned with Ignatius’ understanding of being faithful as a martyr. Faith is fundamental in resisting the tendency towards pride: “do not let a high position make anyone proud, for faith and love are everything; nothing is preferable to them” (I.Smyr. 6.1). Ignatius again pairs faith and love together, and here they are seen as a remedy to an inflated ego. In his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius draws upon the armoury image found in Ephesians and tells the bishop of Smyrna to let “your faith [act] as a helmet” (I.Poly. 6.2: cf Eph. 6.17, “helmet of salvation”).

Faith is a multivalent term in the letters of Ignatius, and it can be deployed with great rhetorical effect to counter behaviours of beliefs that he rejects. In response to certain practices, Ignatius can tell his readers simply to have faith thereby indicating that the alternative is contrary to faith. In an extremely common formulation, Ignatius pairs faith and love together. In combination they are the foremost Christian virtues, and from them stem the other Christian behaviours. Together they are the source and goal of life in Christ (I.Eph. 14.1). Faith can also be used as a shorthand way of referencing the Christian belief system (I.Eph. 10.2).

The Epistle of Polycarp

Terminology from the πιστ- word group occurs on eleven occasions in this letter addressed to the Philippians. Polycarp draws attention to the faith possessed by the Philippians stating that he rejoices “because your firmly rooted faith, renowned from earliest times, still perseveres and bears fruit” (Pol.Phil. 1.2). Here Polycarp refers to Paul’s positive comments concerning the Philippians’ “progress and joy in the faith” (Phil. 1.25). According to Polycarp, the faith of the Philippians in Christ is to be commended because although they have not seen him (presumably like all of Polycarp’s then contemporaries) they “believe (πιστεύετε) in him with an inexpressible joy” (Pol.Phil. 1.3). The Pauline foundation of the Philippian church is made explicit in the epistle, and Polycarp reminds them that when Paul was absent he wrote a letter, which if they study it will be “the means of building you up in the faith which has been given to you” (Pol.Phil. 3.2). The metaphor of building up fellow believers is a Pauline image (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 4:12; 1 Thess 5:11), and here it is applied to a strengthening of faith through recollection of Paul’s letter. Faith is also said to have been given to the Philippians, but the source of that faith is not explicitly stated. It is uncertain whether Paul and his proclamation of the gospel is seen as the source, or whether Polycarp is thinking of an earlier stage whereby faith ultimately comes from Christ or God. The image of “faith given” occurs again, when Polycarp exhorts the Philippians to remind wives of the faith they received (Pol.Phil. 4.2). Next, “widows are to think wisely about their faith in the Lord” (Pol.Phil. 4.2). In this context faith encapsulates one’s whole mode of being and thought as a believer in Christ. The antithesis of living vain or empty lives is conducting oneself “in faith and righteousness” (Pol.Phil. 9.2). Employing an image shared with Ignatius, Polycarp commends stability in faith: “firm and immovable in faith (*fides*)” (Pol.Phil. 10.1). In addition to referring to the letter of Paul to the Philippians, at the request of the

Philippian community Polycarp also sends the Letters of Ignatius to them. He declares that these letters are beneficial “for they deal with faith and patient endurance” (Pol.Phil. 13.2). Primarily, in this letter, “faith” describes the mode of Christian existence both in terms of conduct and beliefs. Faith is something that needs to be strengthened and encouraged, and it is also something where stability needs to be exemplified.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

The language of faith or believing is not particularly prominent in this martyrdom account. This is probably due to the literary form and the contents of the narrative, rather than reflecting any theological stance. There are only two occasions where this word group is used. Polycarp’s fellow believers are referred to as “the faithful” on two occasions (M.Pol. 12.3; 13.2). Faithfulness is a key characteristic that can be used as an identity marker and designation for followers of Christ.

The Didache

The three references to faith in the Didache understand the concept primarily as a mode of conduct, but also as a gift from God. In a prayer of Eucharistic benediction the community offers thanks to the holy Father for making his name known and “for knowledge and faith and immortality” (Did. 10.2). This triad constitute a set of gifts divinely given. In the second reference to faith, the recipients of the teaching are warned that, “the whole time of your faith will be of no use to you if you are not found perfect in the last time” (Did. 16.2). Here the time of faith refers to the whole period of life as a believer. Lastly, in the closing eschatological vision of the text, the audience is warned, “those who endure in their faith will be saved by the accursed one himself” (Did. 16.5). It might be more precise to argue that the expression οἱ δὲ ὑπομείναντες ἐν τῇ πίστει αὐτῶν “probably does not mean ‘to endure in faith’ but ‘to withstand the test by means of their faith.’” (Niederwimmer, 1998, 221) it is likely that this is conveyed in the more compact translation. The final phrase, “will be saved by the accursed one himself”, is baffling, and no conclusive explanation of its meaning has been given.

The Epistle of Barnabas

There are twenty occurrences of the πιστ- word group in the Epistle of Barnabas. Faith is seen both as a description of authentic conduct for believers (Barn. 4.9), and also as designating Christian beliefs (Barn. 2.2). In common with Ignatius, Barnabas utilises the pairing of faith and love: “great are the faith and love dwelling in you” (Barn. 1.4). While this pairing was a favourite of Ignatius, it was neither unique to him, nor did it originate with him. Some of the genitive constructions are as ambiguous in the Epistle of Barnabas as are their counterparts in the New Testament. For instance when stating that “the covenant of the beloved Jesus should be sealed in our hearts” should the following instrumental construction, ἐν ἐλπίδι τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ, be understood as an objective genitive “in hope inspired by faith in him” or as a subjective genitive “in hope inspired by his faithfulness”? There is no clear-cut answer. More apparent is the sentiment that believers are “kept alive by the faith and by the word” (Barn 6.17). Here the substantivized reference to “the faith” coupled with reference to “the word” may move the meaning of πίστις terminology more in the direction of referring to a body of teachings at this point. God is declared to dwell in believers through “his word of faith” (Barn. 16.9). Here faith is something

communicated, and this phrase is set in parallel with expressions such as “the wisdom of the statutes” and “the commands of the doctrines” (Barn. 16.9). This suggests that in this context “faith” is understood in connection with a set of teachings or doctrines. Yet, at other places in the letter “faith” needs to be supplemented with “knowledge” to ensure the spiritual development of the addressees: “I have hastened to write to you briefly, that along with your faith you might have perfect knowledge as well” (Barn. 1.5). This distinction may suggest that whereas faith is attitudinal designating a life committed to God, knowledge is the intellectual understanding of that belief system. However, to see such a distinction may result from separating two ideas that in the author’s mind operate together without a clear division. In the following sentence, revealing the multivalence of faith language, the author speaks of “three basic doctrines of the Lord.” The first of which is “the hope of life, which is the beginning and end of faith” (Barn. 1.6). Although the dogma or teaching is the hope of life, it is acceptance of such hope that inaugurates and brings to fulfilment the entirety of faith.

This connection between *πιστ*- terminology and the hope of eternal life is developed elsewhere in the epistle. Citing Isaiah’s understanding of the servant of the Lord the author states, “the one who believes [*ὁ πιστεύων*] in him will live for ever” (Barn. 6.3). Belief is, however, expressed in the Son of God (Barn. 7.2), rather than being limited to acceptance of a set of teachings alone.

Therefore, the Epistle of Barnabas does not present a tightly circumscribed meaning for the *πιστ*- word group. It encapsulates a variety of ideas. Faith denotes a way of life to be adopted by believers, faith is to be directed to God’s son, and it is also used in connection with descriptions about a set of teachings or doctrines. This range of usages reflects the same range of ideas found throughout the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, and more widely in early Christian writings.

The Shepherd of Hermas

The text known as the Shepherd of Hermas is easily the longest single text in the corpus that forms the Apostolic Fathers. It is therefore unsurprising that it also contains the most usages of *πιστ*- terminology. Moreover, this word group is found across the three sections into which the text is divided. It occurs fifteen times in the Visions, forty-nine times in the Mandates, and forty-two times in the Similitudes. The opening use designates the great blessings God will bestow upon the elect, “if only they shall keep the commandments of God which they have received in great faith” (Herm. Vis. 1.3.4). Here the “great faith” is not explained, but it is the medium through which the commandments of God were received. New believers are described as stones being used to construct the tower mentioned in the vision: “they are those who are young in the faith and are faithful” (Herm. Vis. 3.5.4). Thus while faith is a quality that is necessary for believers, there are different stages in that faith. Furthermore, not all are equally advanced in the faith and some can be classified as being strong in the faith (Herm. Vis. 3.5.5). One of the seven women of the vision who support the tower is “faith.” Followers of Christ need to “clothed ... with faith” as protection against the forces of evil (Herm. Vis. 4.1.8).

In the opening line of the Mandates *πιστ*- language is present: “First of all, believe that God is one” (Herm. Mand. 1.1.1). This signals the requirement of intellectual assent to a proposition concerning the nature of God. In commanding believers not to be prone to outbursts of anger, the author observes that anger “does not lead astray those who are filled with faith” (Herm. Mand. 5.2.1). Therefore, this attitudinal disposition is manifest in behaviour that is free from rage. The corollary of

anger is patience and it is that quality that “dwells with those who have complete faith” (Herm. Mand. 5.2.3). In the virtue list contained in the eighth Mandate, “faith” is the first of the seven qualities listed (Herm. Mand. 8.1.9). Some described as “sick in soul”, are those “who have stumbled in the faith [but] are not thrown out” (Herm. Mand. 8.1.10). By contrast, others can be described as “perfect in faith” (Herm. Mand. 9.1.6). In both instances, faith does not describe assent to a system of beliefs, but a mode of conduct that is consonant with being a follower of Christ. Faith itself is of divine origin (Herm. Mand. 9.1.11).

The understanding of “faith” as a shorthand term for appropriate Christian conduct continues in the Similitudes. Using a clothing metaphor, one is to “put on faith in the Lord” (Herm. Sim. 6.1.2). It is noted that afflictions make one “strong in the faith of the Lord” (Herm. Sim. 6.3.6). Here the genitive construction is best understood as referring to faith that arises from being a believer in Christ. In a second virtue list, faith again is listed first among four cardinal virtues (Herm. Sim. 9.15.2).

The primary way in which faith is understood in the Shepherd of Hermas is as designating the mode of existence required of those who believe in Christ. At times the link between the Mandates or commandments of God and faith places some weight on faith as related to a set of beliefs, but this is a minor perspective within the text.

The Epistle to Diognetus

The literary form of this text is not entirely certain. The opening lines are reminiscent of Luke’s Gospel that is addressed to Theophilus, but this text is certainly not a gospel. It is perhaps better understood as a tract written partially in epistolary form. The question is complicated by the existence of a literary seam that divides chapters 1-10 from 11-12, and many have perhaps correctly seen these sections as originally stemming from distinct literary sources. However, as it stands, and especially in relation to chapters 1-10, the text is in an epistolary form, but has an obvious pedagogical and apologetic function. As such the text stands comfortably alongside the works of some of the other Christian apologists from the mid-second century onwards, such as Justin, Tatian, Theophilus, and perhaps this literary form reached its zenith in the first half of the third century with Origen’s *Contra Celsum*.

There are ten occurrences of πίστ- language in this composite document. The first does not occur until the seventh chapter where the author observes that the stars faithfully follow their courses in line with the divine will (Diog. 7.2). Of more relevance is the discussion concerning divine revelation. The author notes that God “revealed himself through faith, which is the only means by which one is permitted to see God” (Diog. 8.6). As the argument develops it becomes clear that the author understands that revelation to have taken place in God’s Son, and hence the faith of which he speaks is directed towards Christ. In relation to the revealed saviour, believers are “to have faith in his kindness” (Diog. 9.6). Again Christ is the object of faith. The author sees this faith as dependent on intellectual insight: “if this faith is what you too long for, then first of all you must acquire full knowledge of the father” (Diog. 10.1). While faith is dependent on cognitive apprehension of the deity, it is not itself said to be assent to a set of doctrines. The term is left unexplained. In the second section of the letter, which may have been a homily on the Word, disciples are contrasted with those who are unfaithful or unbelieving (ἄπιστος), and are further described as “being regarded as faithful by him [the Word]” (Diog. 11.2). Personified grace is characterized as “rejoicing over the faithful ... who do not break the pledges of the faith” (Diog. 11.5). Therefore faith is portrayed as involving solemn promises,

presumably of loyalty to Christ. As a consequence of keeping these pledges, the author can eulogize that because of such fidelity, “the faith of the gospels is established” (Diog. 11.6). Here the plural suggests that the author is referring to the teachings enshrined in the written gospels. Thus faith is here represented as a set of beliefs that can be found in written form in the gospels.

Conclusion

It is unsurprising that such an abstract semantic word group that is covered by πίστι-terminology has a range of meanings, which although complimentary are not identical. Two major concepts can be identified, although others are also present. The predominant idea is that faith denotes the mode of life that is characteristic of believers. It is not the only characteristic, but it is frequently represented as the cardinal quality, or placed in close tandem with love as the two qualities that exemplify Christian life. The second prominent meaning that emerges is where πίστι-language is used in connection with a set of beliefs or doctrines about God. Yet even when this idea comes to the fore it is rarely expressed in such an absolute manner that the existential nature of faith is fully suppressed. Faith is in many ways a “catch all” term that encapsulates all it means to live as a Christian as well as designation what followers of Christ believe. In this way the understanding of faith expressed in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is broadly analogous to the range of meanings expressed in the New Testament documents.

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